



SOCIAL MEDIA POLICY

1. POLICY STATEMENT

Parish Councillors and staff are expected to use Internet, social media and e-mail systems effectively and responsibly and in accordance with approved operational standards.

Councillors equally have a responsibility to ensure that their private use of internet, social media and e-mail does not impact adversely on the council and its business; compromise their relationship with the council or breach council code of conduct. This policy sets out the expected standards of internet, social media and e-mail use.

2. POLICY AIMS

The key aims of the policy are to:

- Set standards for the proper and lawful use of internet, social media and e-mail in order to minimise and manage the potential risks to Croxley Green Parish Council from inappropriate use.
- Promote efficient and effective use of Internet, social media and e-mail facilities, to best serve the residents of Croxley Green.
- Provide councillors with guidance on their responsibilities when using social media and council e-mail applications.

3. SCOPE

This policy applies to the use of internet, social media and e-mail in the following circumstances:

Council Use: - Use for legitimate council business consistent with the duties and responsibilities of a councillor.

Private Use: - Private use in a councillor's own time which may have an impact on the council.

4. SOCIAL MEDIA

'Social Media' is the collective term commonly given to websites and web applications that are used to discuss, debate and share information on - line. The most common types are: social networking, blogs, content communities, wikis and forums, examples of which include Twitter, Facebook, LinkedIn, YouTube, Flickr and Wikipedia. The need to ensure that Social Media sites are used responsibly, legally and with due regard to the provisions of other relevant council policies, including the Media Relations Policy and codes of conduct applies equally to council and private use.

5. LEGAL LIABILITY

The council may be held liable for any statements made, or contractual arrangements entered into as a result of a councillor's use of internet, social media or e-mail for council use. Vicarious liability may also extend to illegal or unlawful activities carried out by councillor and private use which can be linked to the council. To prevent the council and councillors individually becoming exposed to legal liability (and possibly criminal

proceedings), councillors must not engage in conduct likely to contravene any of the following:

Freedom of Information & Records Management

- The public have the right to request any kind of recorded information from the council subject to some exemptions. This includes all information recorded in e-mails which is therefore open to public scrutiny. Therefore councillors must ensure appropriate use of e-mail and create and keep accurate records.

Intellectual Property

- Copyrighted works include text, graphics, still images, computer software, music and video clips. Any unauthorised copying of those materials by a councillor could render them liable under civil and criminal law.

Defamation

- Communicating a defamatory (untrue) statement about an individual either within, or outside, of the council. The council and the councillor personally could be sued for damages and criminal penalties could also apply.

Harassment and Discrimination

- Communication of offensive remarks, for example, the distribution of sexually explicit or offensive material relating to an individual's personal characteristics, perceived characteristics or those of someone connected to them as defined within equality legislation. These actions are capable of forming the basis of a complaint of harassment and bullying and liability can fall on both the council and the offending councillor.

6. AUTHORISED USE OF SOCIAL MEDIA & EMAIL FACILITIES

Council e-mails are official council records. Council staff must manage e-mail with, and in the same way as other council records. Council e-mail messages are subject to Data Protection, Freedom of Information and Public Records legislation. For security and confidentiality reasons, councillors must never use personal e-mail accounts for the purposes of transmitting information relating to council business or forward e-mail relating to council business from council mailboxes to personal e-mail accounts, unless prior consent has been granted from the Proper Officer.

Social Media Only

The **official** Croxley Green Parish Council social media sites are set up and operated under the guidance of the Proper Officer, and should not be used by councillors themselves.

7. PRIVATE USE OF INTERNET, SOCIAL MEDIA & EMAIL

The council respects a councillor's right to freedom of expression when privately using the Internet, social media and e-mail in their own time. Councillors should however, ensure that they do not inadvertently or otherwise engage in online conduct that could undermine their obligations as a Croxley Green parish councillor. Information posted on social media sites is in the public domain regardless of privacy settings. The author is responsible for the

information posted and is legally liable for any breach or omission arising from his/her actions.

The council's policy in so far as it relates to private use of Internet, social media and e-mail, is underpinned by the following considerations:

- In common with the conditions governing the use of internet, social media and e-mail for council and private purposes, councillors must observe the council's Code of Conduct.
- If commenting on external web pages councillors must make it clear that they are **not** commenting in an official capacity and that the views expressed are their own and do not necessarily reflect the views of the council.
- Should councillors become aware of negative or disparaging remarks about the council or its services, they should not respond but instead inform the Proper Officer.
- Councillors should be aware that colleagues, residents and third parties often have access to the material they may post on the Internet and as such this should be kept in mind when publishing information online that can be viewed by more than friends and family.
- Councillors must never communicate or disclose confidential information online or take up public positions on issues that are counter to the council's interests.
- Many social media sites have the facility for users to write reviews, recommendations or referrals for individuals, businesses or services. If writing a review, recommendation or referral, councillors must ensure that it is clear that they do so as an **individual**, not as a councillor or official representative of the council. By creating the false impression that the council endorses an individual, business or service could result in the council inadvertently incurring a legal liability.

8. REVIEW

POLICY ON USE OF INTERNET, SOCIAL MEDIA AND E-MAIL SYSTEMS PROHIBITED ACTIVITIES

The following list of activities is not exhaustive.

Councillors using the Internet, social media and e-mail for Council or private purposes must not:

Communication

- Claim to represent the views of the council unless authorised to do so
 - Transmit confidential or sensitive information relating to individuals or any aspect of the council's business over the internet, social media sites or via e-mail (other than by council approved, secure systems for external e-mail).
- Publish material or a comment that could undermine public confidence in the council or misrepresent the council and its services.
- Post derogatory comments about the council, its staff or decisions made by the council.

- Publish inflammatory comments about council staff.
- Post expressions of anger or abuse against another councillor.
- Publish untrue statements about another councillor or staff which could damage their reputation or working relationships.
- Post comments to newsgroups on behalf of the council unless authorised to do so.

General

- Purchase goods or services, or conduct other transactions over the Internet in the council's name without proper authorisation in accordance with relevant council procedures in force at the time.
- Subscribe or register with personal newsgroups, shopping or social media sites with council accounts or email addresses.
- Use the council's logo on personal web pages or social media sites.

Sanctions

In the event of potential breach of this Policy the matter will be referred to the HR and Compliance Committee to investigate and take appropriate action. In the case of staff this would take the form of the Council's Disciplinary Procedure and in the case of Councillors the Committee would determine the most appropriate action given the circumstances.